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THE POEMS IN CARLYLE'S TRANSLATION OF WILHELM MEISTER

In a recent review¹ of Miss Simmons' monograph on *Goethe's Lyric Poems in English Translation prior to 1860*, 202 pp., Madison, 1919 (*University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature*, No. 6), Professor W. Kurrelmeyer has singled out for close scrutiny those pages of the book that deal with the poems in Carlyle's translation of *Wilhelm Meister*. His findings suggested a re-examination of what must be admitted to be a rather complicated question. The results of this gleaning were somewhat surprising and seemed sufficiently interesting to warrant the publication of the following notes.

First. On the basis of the editions accessible to her and of Carlyle's prefaces of 1824 and 1839 reprinted in them, Miss Simmons apparently considered herself justified in assuming that the 1824 text of the *Apprenticeship* followed closely the German original and that it remained substantially unchanged in the subsequent editions of 1839 and after. She therefore registered the poems found in the later editions, as for instance the Centenary Edition, under the year 1824 as the date of their first publication. Professor Kurrelmeyer, by comparison of the text of 1824 with that of 1839, shows that this assumption is not warranted. Carlyle allowed himself in 1824 at least one marked deviation from the German original, and in 1839 he made several not insignificant changes in the text of 1824, notwithstanding the fact that in the two prefaces he makes statements which seem to preclude such a procedure. The relation of the different editions of Carlyle's *Wilhelm Meister* has never been made the subject of specific inquiry, and considerable uncertainty on this point exists apparently to this day. Even Professor Kurrelmeyer's important corrections do not tell the whole story.

In his preface of 1824 Carlyle writes of the *Apprenticeship*: "Fidelity is all the merit I have aimed at . . . to alter anything was not in my commission. . . . Accordingly, except a few phrases

¹ *Mod. Lang. Notes*, xxxv (1920), 487-492.

and sentences, not in all amounting to a page, which I have dropped as evidently unfit for the English taste, I have studied to present the work exactly as it stands in German." But in spite of this, the entire thirty-two lines of Philine's song in Book v, Chap. 10, are omitted. In the preface of 1839, on the other hand, in speaking of the relation of the new text to the earlier one, he merely says that in the *Apprenticeship* he "made many little changes"; and yet, aside from whatever other divergences may or may not exist, this innocent reference to "little" changes is meant to cover the reinstatement of the omitted song of Philine and a complete rewriting of Mignon's song at the opening of Book III.²

A feeling of uncertainty is bound to result from the consideration of these facts. It will be even increased if one examines, for instance, the text of the *Collected Works* of 1858 (16 vols., London, Chapman and Hall). Volumes xv, and xvi, which contain *Wilhelm Meister*, furnish no statement whatever as to any further changes or revision. Nevertheless, in Mignon's song alone I notice as many as five not unimportant deviations from the version given by Miss Simmons (p. 19), which according to Professor Kurrelmeyer follows the text of 1839 (I myself have no access to this or any of the earlier editions). They are the following:

- I, 1. 1839: . . . where lemon-trees do bloom,
1858: . . . where citron-apples bloom,
- I, 6. 1839: O my beloved one, I with thee would go!
1858: O my true lov'd one, thou with me must go!
- II, 3. 1839: . . . and look me on:
1858: . . . and look each one:
- II, 6. 1839: . . . I with thee would go!
1858: . . . thou with me must go!
- III, 1. 1839: Know'st thou the mountain bridge that hangs on cloud?³
1858: Know'st thou the hill, the bridge that hangs on cloud?

² In the light of such loose and misleading statements one becomes sceptical even in regard to the 1839 text of the *Travels*, of which Carlyle says that he "changed little or nothing" as compared with the original text in *German Romance* of 1827. The presence or absence of change in the lyrics is of course easily discovered, provided one has access to the respective editions; but other changes would reveal themselves only through a systematic comparison.

³ Thus Miss Simmons; hardly correctly. The Centenary Edition, in the text, prints "mountain, bridge," as do the other editions available to me, while in his "Introduction" Mr. Traill, the editor, prints "mountain-bridge." Cf. below, foot-note 6.

Most of these changes are rather questionable. The second and fourth are hardly intelligible in view of the original German, "Möcht' ich mit dir . . . ziehn!," especially as they even necessitated a corresponding change in the text of the novel itself. In which edition these altered readings were first introduced and how long they maintained themselves I am unable to say. So much is certain, that the 1858 edition enjoyed for some time the reputation of the best standard edition of Carlyle's Works and that the changes cannot possibly be considered as unauthorized.⁴ At any rate, there are then not only two, but three different versions of Carlyle's rendering of Mignon's famous song, of which, to be sure, the second and third are far more closely related than the first and second.

The first version, of 1824, which is not easily accessible and which Professor Kurrelmeyer prints in full on p. 491, has not, as it might seem, entirely escaped Miss Simmons. She has registered it on p. 129, as of the *Edinburgh Review* of 1825 (vol. XLII, 428), where it occurs in a long unsigned article (by Jeffrey, the editor) on the 1824 edition of the *Apprenticeship*. As the latter evidently had appeared without mention of Carlyle as the translator, Jeffrey treats it as published anonymously. Nevertheless it is perfectly clear that the reviewer is dealing with Carlyle's translation, and Miss Simmons would have done well to follow up this clue and not simply record the rendering of the poem as "anonymous," as she has done.

As regards the *Centenary Edition* (30 vols., London, Chapman and Hall, 1896 ff.; vols. 23-24, 1899), generally regarded as the completest and most trustworthy edition of Carlyle, it apparently prints both parts of the novel according to the edition of 1839. At least the text of Mignon's song is clearly that of 1839.⁵ Never-

*It is interesting to note that of recent popular editions those in *Everyman's Library* and in *Warner's Library of the World's Best Literature*, perhaps in consequence of copyright arrangements with the London publishers, have continued to print this 1858 version, whereas later editions by Chapman and Hall seem to have given it up again and returned to the text of 1839. "A new edition, revised" by Houghton Mifflin & Co. (2 vols., Boston, n. d.) shows even the following contamination: the 1858 version in the first four instances, but the 1839 reading (mountain, bridge) in the fifth.

⁵In the rendering of the Minstrel's song, "Wer nie sein Brot mit Tränen ass," the first stanza in the Centenary Edition ends, "ye heavenly Powers." All other editions accessible to me read, "ye gloomy Powers," and in Carlyle's Goethe article in the *Foreign Review* of 1828 (II, 105) I find "ye

theless the editor, H. D. Traill, thruout his "Introduction" does not so much as mention the revision of that year. On the contrary, he connects Carlyle's work on the translation exclusively with the years 1823-4. He states at some length that "at that particular stage of his career," *i. e.*, late in 1823, Carlyle was "inspired, perhaps for the first and last time, as a verse translator by Mignon's famous song," and thereupon, to prove his point, admiringly quotes the first two lines of the last stanza—in the completely altered version of 1839!

Know'st thou the mountain-bridge* that hangs on cloud?
The mules in mist grope o'er the torrent loud.

It is perfectly clear therefore that he is as little aware as is Miss Simmons of the existence of the earlier (1824) version of Mignon's song, and his further remarks about what he conceives to have been Philine's special attraction for Carlyle—no matter whether in itself the point is correctly taken or not—plainly show that he knows as little as she does of the original omission of the damsel's song.

Mr. Traill's introduction is moreover meant to apply not only to the *Apprenticeship*, but to the novel as a whole, and he indeed refers in it to the *Travels* as well. Nevertheless, the only period which he assigns to Carlyle's work on *Wilhelm Meister* is that from September, 1823, to early in 1824; nor is there any mention of the fact that the *Travels* originally formed part of the *Specimens of German Romance* (1827). The "Introduction" to the latter (vols. 21-22), from which the *Travels* are of course omitted, does not contain one word of explanation either. In fact, Mr. Traill's two introductions, taken together, would amply justify the confusion which prevails on this point in numerous works of reference⁷

unseen Powers." I am unable, at this writing, to account for this change in the Centenary Edition and wonder whether it is actually Carlyle's. Interesting, in this connection, is a statement by A. H. O[lough] in his review of the 1859 edition of Aytoun and Martin's *Poems and Ballads of Goethe* (*Fraser's Magazine*, vol. LIX, 713): "There is . . . an evident unwillingness to render *himmlischen* simply and without any addition by *heavenly*."

* This is not even the reading of his own subsequent text (cf. above, footnote 3), and I am inclined to believe that there is no authority for it whatever.

⁷ Cf. e. g. Wülcker's misleading statement in his *Geschichte der englischen Literatur* (1896, p. 559), where, after mentioning the work on the *Life of*

and which is even supported by some of the editions of as responsible and widely known publishers as the London house of Chapman and Hall. I refer, for instance, to their undated edition in three volumes of the *Apprenticeship and Travels* (evidently identical with vols. 33-35 of the *People's Edition*, 1871-74; published in this country with the imprint of Scribner, Welford and Co. of New York). The text printed is probably that of 1839, clearly not the earlier texts of 1824 and 1827, but none the less each one of the three volumes (even vol. 3, which contains nothing but the *Travels*!) bears on the title page the utterly misleading date, [1824].

In the light of so astonishing a situation as this, Professor Kurrelmeyer's censure of Miss Simmons for not having "the least knowledge, or concern, about earlier and later versions . . . of Carlyle" would seem to apply with even stronger force to the editor of the *Centenary Edition*, who, no doubt, enjoyed the advantage of access to all the earlier editions concerned.

Second. As regards the lyrics in Carlyle's translation of the *Travels*, Professor Kurrelmeyer shows that Miss Simmons has created considerable confusion in her Index E. Not only does she assign to the year 1824 the lyrics from the *Travels*, which were not published till 1827, but, despite Carlyle's definite statement in his Preface of 1839, she fails to recognize that he translated from the German edition of 1821 and adhered to this text even after Goethe in 1829 had published a second version of the *Wanderjahre*, which in many respects differs widely from that of 1821.

The error is a serious one. As a result, five poems which Carlyle never translated have been erroneously assigned to him, while six, which he did translate, have not been listed. Fortunately, practically all of these "poems" are single short stanzas, some of them merely "Sprüche" of two or four lines, so that the illegitimate gain amounts in all to 56 lines, the unjustified loss to only 22 lines, all of them very little known and rarely printed. This circumstance is not mentioned to excuse Miss Simmons, but merely to show the proportionate extent of the defect in an investigation which attempts to survey, for a first time and under exceedingly

Schiller in 1823-24, the author continues: "eine Übersetzung von Goethes 'Wilhelm Meister' schloss sich an, und 1827 folgte eine 'Sammlung von deutschen Erzählungen' (*Specimens of German Romance*)."

difficult conditions, a material consisting approximately of 500 single poems and "Sprüche" with a total of over 10,000 lines, in 1500 different versions or printings.

Goethe's edition of 1821 was prefaced by a group of short poems or 'Sprüche,' all of which were omitted in the later edition of 1829. In the Weimar edition, aside from being enumerated in front of the variants of the *Wanderjahre* in vol. 25, 2, they are confusingly scattered thru different volumes and groups of the *Gedichte*, inclusive of the *West-östlicher Divan*. Professor Kurrelmeyer, after pointing out Miss Simmons' error in overlooking these poems in Goethe and failing to recognize them in Carlyle, continues (p. 489 f.) :

"Carlyle translated all but two of these poems, which first appeared in *German Romance* (iv, 33 ff.), and which could have been found in any subsequent edition of Carlyle's translation. The poems in question are: *Wandersegen* ⁸ (Weim. Ed. III, 160); *Prüft das Geschick dich* (vi, 119); *Was machst du an der Welt* (vi, 120); *Enweri sagt's* (vi, 121); *Mein Erbtheil wie herrlich* (vi, 121); *Noch ist es Tag* (vi, 119)."

Even this statement, however, does not correctly represent the actual situation. According to it, one would have to assume that Carlyle translated six poems out of a group of eight, whereas, as a matter of fact, the *Wanderjahre* of 1821 were prefaced by eleven such pieces, of which Carlyle translated eight. Professor Kurrelmeyer, to be sure, mentions the two remaining renderings of Carlyle in a preceding paragraph, in which he deals with the "group of nine poems printed in the Weimar Edition (v, 24-31)⁹ under the heading 'Aus Wilhelm Meister,'" without however stating that these two from this heterogeneous group belong also to the prefatory group in question. But even if this allowance is made, the statement should not be that Carlyle translated "all but two," but all but three. The three which he left untranslated are: *Ehe wir nun weiter schreiten* (Weim. ed. iv, 19); *Was wird mir jede Stunde so bang?* (vi, 118); and *Wie man nur so leben mag?* (III, 162).

⁸I. e., "Die Wanderjahre sind nun angetreten" ("To travel now th' Apprentice does essay"). The title *Wandersegen*, was not given the poem till later.

⁹Should read v, 1, 24-31. The poems in question are, *Wüsste kaum genau zu sagen* and *Und so heb' ich alte Schätze*.

A clear and easy survey of this question is further complicated by the fact that Carlyle changed the order of those poems which he retained. Numbering consecutively from 1 to 11 the poems as listed in the Weimar edition (25, 2, 1), Carlyle translated, in order, 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 2, and left out 4, 5, 11.

Professor Kurrelmeyer has clearly proved that in her discussion of the lyrics in Carlyle's *Wilhelm Meister* Miss Simmons has committed serious errors, and all interested in her study are under obligation to him for the thoroughness with which he has proceeded. At the same time, in justice to Miss Simmons and her labors, it should not be overlooked that, a tyro, she went astray in a field in which even veterans and specialists have stumbled.

There are no doubt other omissions and errors that will gradually show in some of Miss Simmons' bibliographical data, for a first survey of so extensive a field cannot possibly be expected to be perfect. But it is one of the services of her study, and not its least, that it has furnished the pegs on which to hang future observations and chance discoveries, which heretofore have too often been destined to remain scattered or entirely unregistered. From my own collections I could furnish already quite a few such items. So no doubt could many others. Translation literature is a subject of investigation of which both the importance and the difficulty have long been underestimated. It has generally received but niggardly treatment in the bibliographies of both of the national literatures concerned in each case. The ground is therefore but ill broken, and much pioneer work will still have to be done before such efforts as, for instance, have been devoted to the bibliography of German literature in English translations in the third edition of volume IV of Goedeke's *Grundriss* can lay claim to even approximate accuracy and completeness.

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